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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BASRAH 000051

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SUBJECT: DISPLACED PERSONS IN SOUTHERN IRAQ INCREASE

REF: A) HILLAH 45, B) HILLAH 56

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CLASSIFIED BY: Ken Gross, REGIONAL COORDINATOR, REO BASRAH,
DEPARTMENT OF STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶11. (C) Summary: Significant population displacement has taken place throughout southern Iraq since the attack on the Samarra mosque on February 22, both of Shia families moving into the provinces of Basrah, Dhi Qar, Muthanna, and Maysan, and of Sunni families leaving southern provinces. Precise numbers of Shia families moving to the south are available from the Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Figures of Sunnis leaving the south are available but less comprehensive; anecdotal reporting suggests that sizeable Sunni and Christian populations are leaving the southern provinces. Displacement in the south is complicated by the presence of thousands of displaced families from the draining of the marshes that took place in the 1990's. Despite the challenges, local authorities and humanitarian organizations are providing adequate services to the new families seeking assistance in Basrah, and are even looking to extend help to Najaf. Official denial of the emigration of minorities from the south, however, is strong. We believe further evacuation of a significant portion of Basrah's estimated 400,000 minority population will take place this summer when the academic year ends. End Summary.

Current and On-Going Displacement

¶12. (C) Significant population displacement has taken place throughout southern Iraq since the attack on the Samarra mosque on February 22, both of Shia families moving into the provinces of Basrah, Dhi Qar, Muthanna, and Maysan, and of Sunni families leaving the south. The IOM's April 4 "Displacement Due to Recent Violence" report provides information collected from the MoDM and other monitoring organizations about displacement in the southern provinces. The MoDM and other organizations report that the number of displaced families in Muthanna is 360 and the number of displaced families in Maysan is 320 (Note: The IOM estimates that each family has six members. End Note). In Basrah and Dhi Qar provinces, however, there is a discrepancy between the numbers of displaced families reported by the MoDM and the other monitoring organizations. In Dhi Qar, the MoDM provided the figure of 575 while the other organizations put the number at 440. In Basrah, the MoDM reports that there are 250 displaced families while the other organizations put the number at 71. (Comment: The IOM report notes that the displacement in the south is "on-going" and can result in tabulation discrepancies among organizations. A Red Crescent contact

remarked that displaced families register with any available organization when seeking assistance, resulting in double counting. Another REO contact suggested that the higher MoDM figure may be a cumulative account of displaced families, while the other organizations monitoring displacement have only been doing so since February 22. End Comment.)

¶13. (SBU) Shia families moving into Basrah register with the MoDM as coming from Baghdad, Anbar, and Salah Al Din provinces. Those moving into Dhi Qar come from Baghdad, Anbar, Salah Al Din, Babylon, Tameem, and Diyala. Those moving into Muthanna and Maysan are arriving from the Baghdad neighborhoods of Abu Greb, Aldora, and Mahmudiya.

¶14. (C) The IOM report includes April 2 figures from the MoDM that 345 Sunni families displaced from Basrah registered with the MoDM in Anbar province, in the cities of Ramadi, Habaniya, Khaldiya, Heet, Kubaesa, Hadetha, Ana, Rawa, Faluja, Karma, and Amiriya. (Note: Of the 345 Sunni families registering in Anbar, 192 of them registered in Faluja. End Note.) In addition, seven Sunni families originally from Maysan registered in Ana in Anbar, and eight Sunni families originally from Dhi Qar have registered in Ramadi and Heet. Anecdotal reporting corroborates the displacement of Sunni families from Basrah and other southern provinces, and the number of Sunni families displaced from the south is likely to grow as reports come in from other provinces.

¶15. (C) Despite growing evidence of significant Sunni displacement from Basrah province, local officials in Basrah deny that such displacement is occurring. In an April 6 Humanitarian Sector Working Group meeting in Basrah organized by the UN representative in Basrah, Basrah Provincial Council (BPC) Member and Chair of the Humanitarian Committee Seyid Hasanein Al Safi, a Shia imam, estimated that only about five Sunni families had left Basrah since February 22 because of sectarian violence.

Sunni contacts, however, report that "thousands" are leaving Basrah. Increased targeting of Sunnis and Christians in Basrah for threats, murders, and kidnappings will be discussed in

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septel.

¶16. (U) Local press coverage of displaced Shia families entering the south is increasing as the numbers of the displaced grow. "Al Sabah" on-line news (April 4) reported that 150 families moved into Dhi Qar near Nassiriyah from Baghdad and were living in mosques and schools. "Al Manarah" news (April 2) reported that 70 families have registered with the Basrah Immigration Office and that the number is increasing.

Local Support for Displaced Families Strong

¶17. (C) Displaced families have been receiving support from the BPC, Iraqi Red Crescent, World Health Organization (WHO), World Food Program (WFP), and the MoDM, among others. Other assistance organizations, such as USAID, have been providing consistent help to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Iraq for more than a decade. (Note: The Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance has recently supported IDPs in Maysan province with \$2.9 million in water and sanitation programs, as well as providing emergency support to this winter's flood victims in Safwan. End Note.) The system set in place for providing support to the displaced is well structured and operating smoothly. The BPC functions as the coordinator of the other assistance organizations. The Red Crescent and WFP provide food, housing, school uniforms and supplies, and register families for assistance. The WHO visits displaced families in order to vaccinate children and spray the areas against mosquitoes. The MoDM assists families in transferring Public Distribution System ration cards from one province to another. Representatives from the above organizations agreed during the April 6 Humanitarian SWG meeting that the establishment of camps for displaced families is an undesirable solution to the current situation. Camps would attract more families than could be

managed and would be difficult to close, in addition to requiring substantial security and maintenance investments.

¶18. (C) Assistance organizations identified property claims disputes as a potential future complication during the April 6 meeting. Since many families left their homes under emergency conditions, they did not bring with them identification documents or legal deeds and titles to property in their provinces of origin. Abandoned residences in other provinces are now suspected of being inhabited by squatters, and property claims disputes will be a problem when currently displaced families attempt to return to their homes and reclaim their property.

¶19. (C) Assistance organizations present at the April 6 meeting indicated that they planned to provide as much assistance as possible to Najaf province. All agreed that the situation in Najaf was much worse than in Basrah (as per reflets A and B). A meeting is planned to take place in Basrah on April 10 with representatives from Najaf to organize additional assistance.

Previous Marshland Displacement

¶10. (C) All four southern provinces were affected by internal displacement during the 1990s due to Saddam's policy of draining the marshes. The IOM reports that about 17,000 families were displaced throughout the four provinces as a result of this policy. Most of these families left the marshes to resettle in urban areas. Since 2003, and with the partial rehabilitation of the marshes, some of these families have returned to the marshes. However, a significant number of the families indicate that they desire to remain in their new location rather than return to a sharecropping existence in the marshes.

¶11. (C) Marshland displacement, unlike the current displacement due to violence, took place for the most part within provinces. Rather than moving from one province to another, marsh Arabs moved from the marshlands to a nearby town within the same province. A significant number of marsh Arabs moved into the towns of Basrah, Nassiriyah, and Amarah.

¶12. (C) The same organizations providing services and assistance to the displaced marsh Arabs of the 1990s are now tasked with providing assistance to growing numbers of displaced families from other provinces due to sectarian violence since February ¶122. One of the reasons why the assistance currently being provided to displaced families in the southern provinces is so well run may be because these organizations are well-established in the area and already have a lot of practice. Long-term assistance to resettle marsh Arabs in the current places of residences has been identified as a significant need by these organizations, while the current displacement due to sectarian violence is being treated as a short-term problem.

Comment

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¶13. (C) It is unclear if the current displacement in the southern provinces due to sectarian violence will be a long- or a short-term problem. Sunni and Christian contacts report to us that many of them plan to wait to depart Basrah until the end of the school year in order not to disrupt their children's education. Other minority contacts report that they are attempting to sell their houses and property before moving away.

They list northern Iraq, Baghdad, Jordan, and Syria as destinations. We believe that the minority families who have already left Basrah fled quickly because they faced immediate danger and direct threats, and were living in the most volatile neighborhoods and areas of Basrah. Those who plan to leave in the summer, after methodically withdrawing their children from school and selling off property, are those who do not face direct threats and feel safe for the moment, but who are unwilling to risk living in Basrah much longer because of the

rising sectarian violence. This amount of planning and forethought going into leaving Basrah indicates that many minorities do not intend to return to the area anytime soon.
GROSS